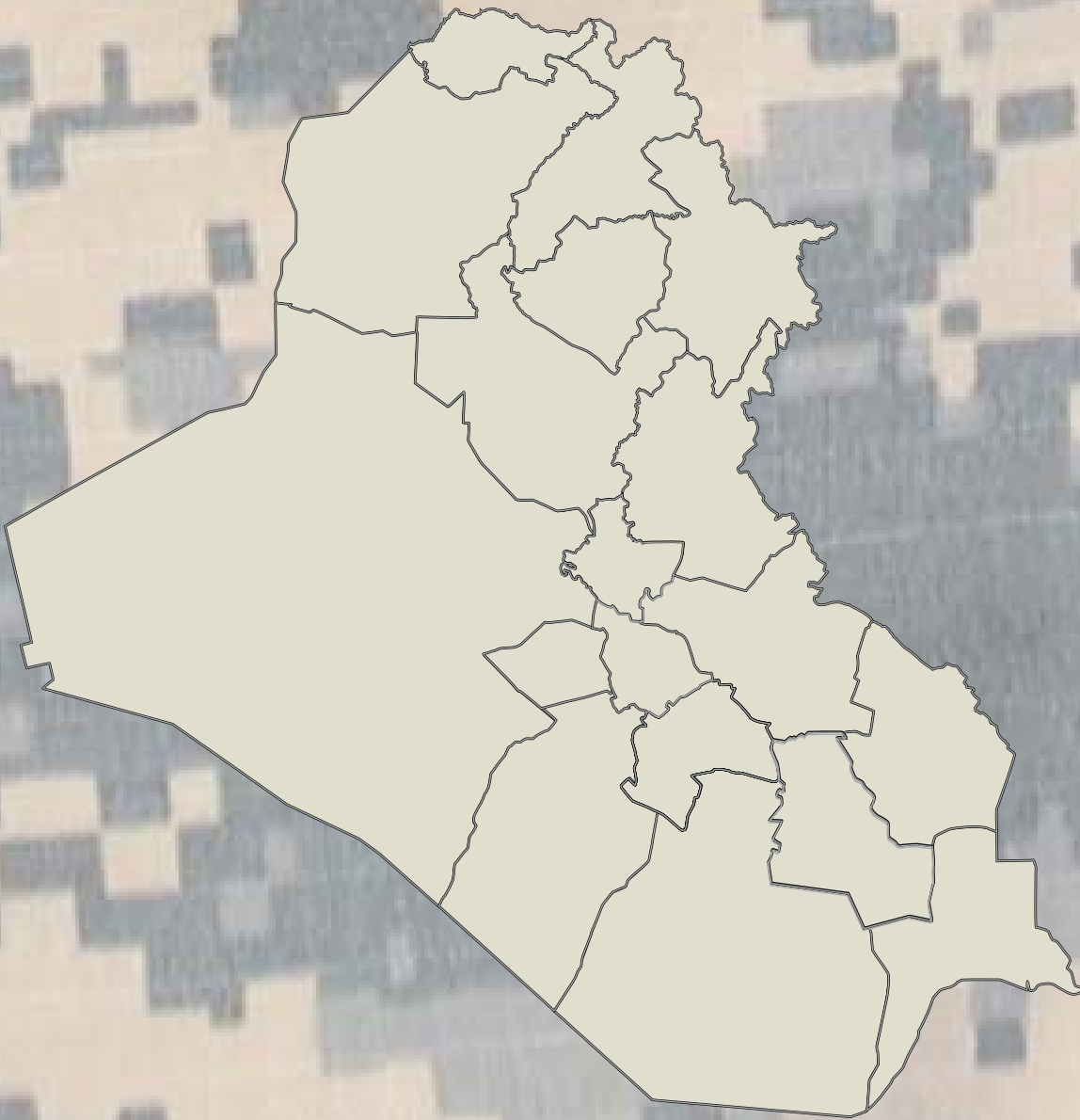# Iraq Reconstruction Special Report:

Reconstruction Leaders' Perceptions of the Commander's Emergency Response Program in Iraq

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SIGIR

SPECIAL REPORT NUMBER 1

RECONSTRUCTION LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE
COMMANDER'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROGRAM IN IRAQ

Special Report, April 30, 2012

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Background and Objectives

Introduction

Since 2004, the Congress authorized almost $4 billion for the Department of Defense's (DoD) Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) in Iraq. The CERP's purpose was to enable commanders to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within their areas of responsibility by carrying out programs and projects that provided immediate support to the Iraqi people. American Commanders in Iraq used CERP funds to build schools, roads, health clinics, sewers, and for non-construction projects like micro-grants to support economic development and condolence payments.

The DoD viewed CERP as an important counterinsurgency tool that contributed to maintaining stability. The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) previously reported on the use of CERP in Iraq, raising questions about its scope, the challenges of managing large projects, and the susceptibility of the program to fraud. SIGIR's critique were echoed by others' concerns about the use of CERP to support conventional (i.e., non-counterinsurgency) stabilization and reconstruction objectives, and whether the rules and procedures in place were adequate to safeguard the program from abuse.

To ascertain the utility of CERP, SIGIR disseminated a survey that solicited the insights of reconstruction personnel who used or were associated with CERP. Along with Army battalion commanders (the primary CERP users), SIGIR surveyed United States Marine Corps (USMC) battalion commanders, State Department Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) leaders, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) PRT members, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) officials. Taken together, these groups represent the primary U.S. government bodies responsible for the nomination, execution, and subsequent monitoring and evaluation of CERP projects during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). They witnessed the impact that CERP projects had on local communities, and they had first-hand knowledge about the bureaucratic, operational, and cultural challenges associated with project implementation. A total of 390 people completed the survey, including 194 Army battalion commanders, 14 USMC battalion commanders, 27 from USACE, 128 DoS personnel, and 27 from USAID.

Overall Survey Objectives

SIGIR developed and administered the CERP survey to gain information about the processes for project nomination, implementation, management, evaluation, and results of CERP projects. Specifically, SIGIR examined:

1. the extent to which commanders used CERP and the time required to manage CERP projects;

2. the outcomes commanders tried to achieve with CERP and the relationship between intended outcomes and the types of projects to which funding was dedicated;

3. the measures of effectiveness commanders used to assess whether projects were meeting intended outcomes and the perceived efficacy of projects executed at different times and in different areas;

4. the effectiveness of coordination among commanders, their higher headquarters, and other U.S. government agencies involved in stabilization and reconstruction, and;

5. the degree of fraud and corruption in CERP projects.

This report constitutes the first broad-based, public survey of first-line military and civilian leaders' perspectives on CERP.

Perceptions of Battalion Commanders

The survey is organized into five sections: (1) the extent that commanders used CERP and the time required to manage projects, (2) the uses and intended outcomes of CERP projects, (3) metrics and measures of effectiveness, (4) interagency coordination surrounding project execution and management, and (5) fraud and corruption associated with CERP.

The Extent to which Commanders Used CERP and the Time Required To Manage CERP Projects

Approximately two-thirds of the former battalion commanders surveyed reported spending more than one million dollars on CERP projects during their tenure. Among commanders who served both during and after the surge of American forces in 2007, approximately one-quarter reported spending more than ten million dollars.

Table 1—Distribution of Total Amount of Money Spent on CERP Projects by Time of Command[1]

	<$1M	$1M-$10M	$10M-$20M	$20M-$50M	>$50M
Pre-Surge	44%	43%	7%	3%	3%
Surge	30%	43%	16%	5%	5%
Post-Surge	43%	32%	15%	5%	6%

Before the surge, 75% of commanders reported that CERP management consumed more than 10% of their time and 23% reported that CERP management took more than 25%. This included project nomination, execution, management, and evaluation. After the surge, the average time investment decreased slightly, with 71% reporting that CERP took more than 10% of their time.

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[1] For this report the surge is the years 2007 and 2008. In the survey, respondents were asked to identify the start and end of their deployments. If the response was six months or more during the years 2007 and 2008 we considered them as having served during the surge. If their time in Iraq was before those years we considered them to be pre-surge. If their time in Iraq was after those years we considered them as having served post-surge. More details about our survey methodology are in Appendix A.

Types of Projects Selected and Desired Outcomes

This section of the survey focused on how the commanders used CERP, the types of projects selected, and the intended outcomes. We asked commanders to evaluate what projects they perceived to be the most and the least effective.

Types of Projects Selected

Battalion commanders favored water and sanitation, education, civic cleanup, and condolence payments. Reducing violence, economic development, and improving governance were the primary reasons they implemented these projects. Three types of projects stand out for their lack of commanders' support: civic support vehicles, detainee payments, and telecommunications; comments did not explain why they were not seen as effective. On average, commanders reported executing at least eight different types of projects during their time in Iraq. Table 2 shows how commanders used CERP.

Table 2—Reported Uses of CERP Funding Among Former Battalion Commanders in Iraq Before, During, and After the Surge[2]

	Pre-Surge	Surge	Post-Surge
Agriculture	38%	46%	64%
Battle Damage Repair	60%	57%	26%
Civic Cleanup Activities	65%	74%	67%
Civic Support Vehicles	12%	11%	8%
Condolence Payments	66%	74%	39%
Economic, Financial and Management Improvements	38%	69%	75%
Education (incl. Schools and School Supplies)	76%	78%	74%
Electricity	44%	54%	39%
Food Production and Distribution	13%	19%	28%
Former Detainee Payments	9%	13%	10%
Healthcare (incl. Health Clinics and Supplies)	63%	52%	44%
Iraqi Hero Payments	15%	26%	18%
Other Urgent Humanitarian Needs	25%	24%	26%
Protective Measures	44%	50%	39%
Repair of Civic and Cultural Facilities	38%	48%	39%
Rule of Law and Governance	35%	52%	28%
Telecommunications	22%	69%	30%
Temporary Contract Guards (incl. SOI)	10%	7%	5%
Water and Sanitation	76%	70%	74%

Desired Outcomes

SIGIR asked commanders to identify the three most significant outcomes they sought to achieve through their CERP projects. As shown in Table 3, reducing violence, spurring economic development, and increasing government capacity were the most common outcomes sought.

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[2] The most recent version of the MAAWS handbook lists 20 permitted uses of CERP. The survey asked respondents about 19. "Transportation" was accidentally omitted from the list.

Table 3—Intended Outcome of CERP Projects By Time of Deployment

	Pre-Surge	Surge	Post-Surge
	(N = 68)	(N = 54)	(N = 61)
Reduction in Violence	65%	70%	51%
Employment/Economic Development	82%	81%	84%
Reconciliation	12%	24%	16%
Improved Government Capacity	65%	59%	56%
Goodwill Toward Coalition Forces	44%	19%	34%

Although reducing violence statistically was the second most-desired CERP outcome, some commanders' written comments linked other desired outcomes back to the goal of violence reduction. One commander wrote that the "primary focus for the use of CERP was for the security of coalition soldiers. By establishing capacity with the Iraqis, there was a direct relation to the decrease in attacks on U.S. soldiers. Improve Government Capacity was close to or equal to the economic development (produce markets for jobs)" (Ninewa).[3] Another commander explained that "the best projects for quick turn-around effects were [to] hire 100 Iraqis to clear brush or get a 3 month contract to get the trash picked up. It made [travel] routes safer but as soon as we left the [area of operations] the same Iraqis went back out, threw trash all over and started laying [improvised explosive devices]. Immediate effect–good; long term–wasted" (Salah al-Din).

In their written comments, commanders did not embrace CERP as a useful vehicle for long-term stabilization and reconstruction efforts:

- "CERP must be allocated as an emergency measure rather than a substitute for long term development" (Babylon).

- CERP "was/is a good system but as the name implies, it should be only be used for emergency requirements, where [instead] we tried to prosecute wholesale reconstruction efforts with it. All in all it was a very important tool, but it wound up getting used/applied to efforts that should have been solved via Iraqi systems" (Baghdad, 2005-2006).

- "CERP funded projects were initiated without proper consideration of long term sustainability and maintenance" (Missan).

Several commanders cited "building relationships" as a desired outcome, even though the MAAWS Handbook does not identify it as an authorized use of CERP:

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[3] Survey respondents were asked to provide locations and times for their service. However, those participating in the survey were also assured that their answers would remain anonymous. In the interest of providing the reader with context about the quotes while preserving the respondents' anonymity, most Army battalion commander quotes will be referenced only according to their location of service. For commanders that served in Baghdad, the years of their tour of duty will also be provided because many commanders served in the Baghdad area. For further information about survey methodology and respondent anonymity, see Appendix A.

- "Having CERP funds available was a very powerful tool for shaping operations. It builds partnerships and a willingness to work together. Also, the threat of me pulling funds from a project was just as powerful as continuing a project. Without CERP, we would have been seen as far less credible" (Baghdad, 2006-2007).

- "CERP is an excellent tool in small amounts for Commanders to influence their area of operations. If a commander loses this tool, he will lose credibility from locals" (Baghdad, 2003-2004).

- "Small projects may not nest well with higher CERP priorities but may create a key inroad to building strong relationships with the tribes and local governance… The key to success was developing strong genuine relationships with the local tribes and government institutions" (Kirkuk/Tameem).

Considerations in Selecting CERP Projects

We asked battalion commanders to rank their three most important considerations when selecting CERP projects from the six considerations we provided: Personal Observation; Subordinate Recommendation; Orders from Higher Headquarters; Requests from Other U.S. agencies; Government of Iraq Requests; and Iraqi Citizen Requests. Commanders could write-in and rank additional considerations.

Commanders were least likely to rank higher headquarters or other U.S. government agency requests as among the three most important considerations; only 30% of commanders ranked either one in the top three. Approximately 66% ranked personal observation and 67% ranked subordinate recommendations as the most important considerations. Approximately 50% of commanders ranked government requests and citizen requests among the three most important considerations.

The importance of involving the GOI and Iraqi citizens in the project selection process is detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1—Percentage of Commanders Ranking GOI and/or Iraqi Citizen Requests as Among the Most Important Considerations When Nominating CERP Projects, by Time of Deployment
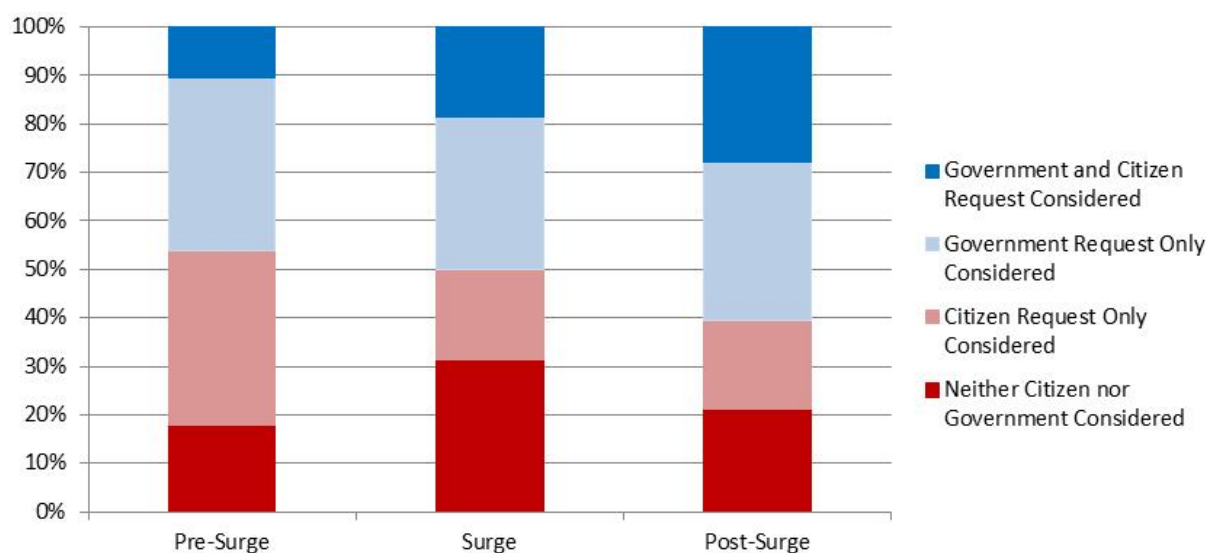
Commanders' comments described more engagements with the government as governmental institutions gained strength and legitimacy.

- "As the GOI became able to govern and provide basic services, their input became more important. My local GOI partners got very good at prioritizing what they needed help on to get the biggest bang for CERP or I-CERP [Iraqi Commander's Emergency Response Program]" (Baghdad and Anbar).

- "'Money as a weapon' is as effective as the local national leaders effectiveness to influence and/or support their 'constituents' or affected populace…to lead project efforts, get the message out to their people…" (Baghdad, 2006-2008).

Commanders who served in Baghdad were more likely than those who served elsewhere to identify GOI requests as an important consideration in selecting projects. They were also more likely to consider both government and local citizen input in the nomination process. One commander explained the challenge of balancing a wide range of Iraqi voices: "Focus and use of CERP must be delicately balanced between the local desires and their government's desires at higher levels" (Anbar).

Battalion commanders consistently emphasized the importance of local buy-in for the CERP process to succeed:

- "Building consensus from the populace either through a formal town or community council or an existing governing body ensures that the people see development as a product of their leaders. Even if they know the money comes from the U.S., seeing a government entity prioritize and fight for their interests instills confidence" (Anbar).

- "Involving the government is important for timely project completion because the money [will] be spent through local government officials who are already accountable to a constituency. Involving the government in CERP projects is critical to minimize wasteful invest[ment] in something that is already receiving adequate funding within host nation channels (i.e. paying for trash cleanup when the local government is already funded and has the capacity to do the job)" (Ninewa).

Several were critical of the lack of engagement with the Iraqi government and the local populace. One commander for example, noted that "too many unwanted projects were done with no GOI buy-in or [operations and maintenance] funding to sustain the project after completion" (Baghdad and Anbar). Another was similarly critical, noting that "too much money was thrown away on American good ideas, as opposed to Iraqi real needs" (Anbar and Ninewa). The survey data provided some evidence of a connection between degree of local involvement and project effectiveness. For 9 of the 19 different project types surveyed, there was a significant relationship between commanders' consideration of government or citizen input and the perceived effectiveness of the project.

Commanders who considered government requests in selecting projects generally rated battle-damage repair, civil clean-up, and rule-of-law projects as more effective. Similarly, commanders who considered GOI input in selecting projects were more than twice as likely to rate civic clean-up as being among the most effective projects compared to those who did not (27% and 11%, respectively).

For agricultural projects, economic, financial, and management projects, food distribution and production projects, and civic infrastructure repair projects there was a negative correlation between citizen input and perceived effectiveness. Overall, most commanders responded that they viewed projects in these areas as more effective when they were selected and designed by U.S. officials without any Iraqi citizen involvement. This runs counter to traditional thinking about development best practices. There was some variation by geographic area, with a negative

correlation for agricultural projects and citizen input only in Baghdad and a negative correlation for economic, financial, and management projects occurring only outside of Baghdad.

Most and Least Effective Projects

Our survey sought to identify projects that were consistently viewed as effective or ineffective within and across geographic regions. Figure 2 shows the percentage of former battalion commanders' ratings for different types of projects. For example, it shows the three most effective and the three least effective projects and includes only ratings from commanders who reported actually completing projects of that type.

Figure 2—Battalion Commanders' Evaluations of CERP Project Effectiveness by Project Type
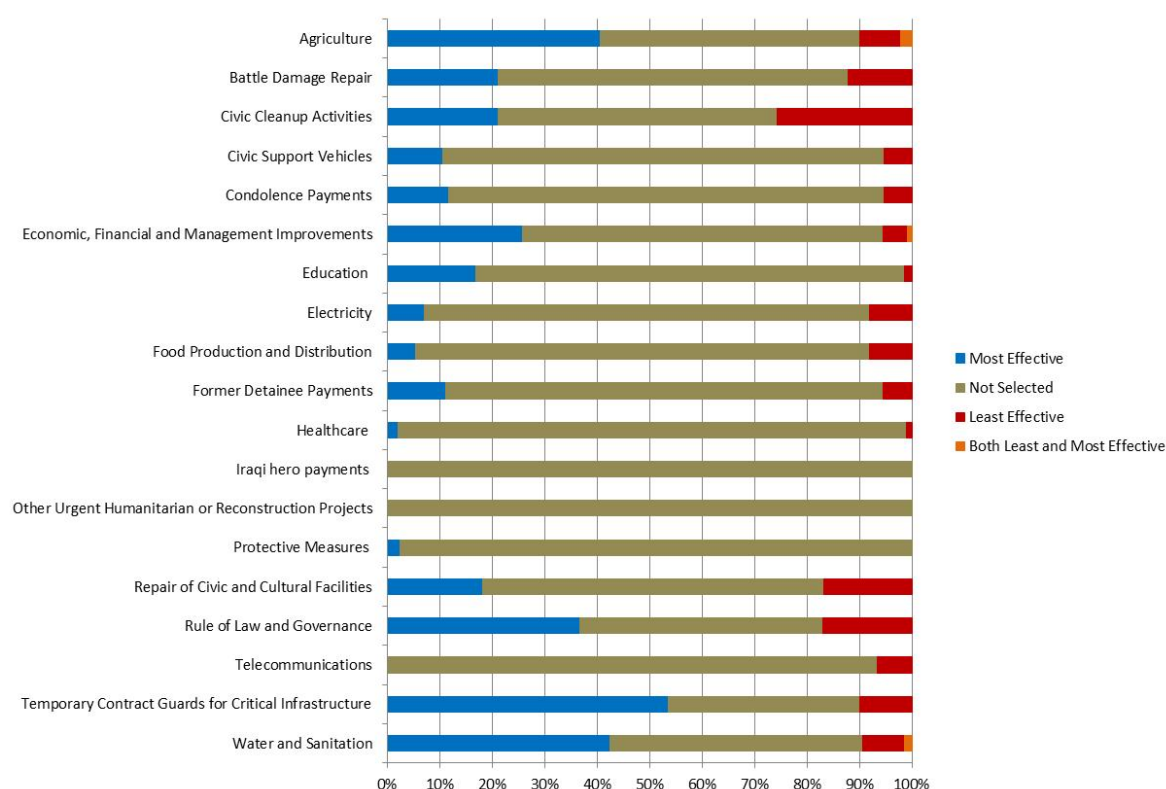
Further, Figure 2 shows that only seven types of projects were identified as being among the most effective by more than 20% of battalion commanders who completed projects of that type. The use of temporary contract guards, which included the Sons of Iraq program, was considered the most effective project type by more than half (52%) of the battalion commanders who used CERP for that purpose. About 40% viewed water and sanitation projects, agricultural projects, and temporary contract guards as the most effective. Civic cleanup activities were rated the least effective by 25% of battalion commanders who ran those CERP projects. Only three other project types were considered ineffective by more than 10% of the respondents: rule of law and governance, repair of civic and government facilities, and battle-damage repair.

Reduction in Violence Used To Measure Effectiveness

This section asked battalion commanders to identify and describe the metrics used within their battalion and by higher headquarters to measure project effectiveness.

Most Common Metrics

Between 30% and 40% of battalion commanders used general levels of violence as an indicator of project success:

- "We used CERP to buy down violence against us" (Salah al-Din).

- "CERP is a critical tool for commanders on the battlefield…Imperative for security of U.S. forces" (Baghdad).

- "The most telling indicator of the effectiveness was that the levels of violence continued to decrease and the local citizens felt that their lives were indeed getting better even as our unit conducted a [Relief in Place/Transfer of Authority] at the end of our tour. Attacks against our units significantly decreased as conditions improved. We believe this was based on the increased levels of trust between the local populace, Iraqi security forces, and our units" (Baghdad, 2007-2008).

- "The ability to use U.S. CERP followed in 2008 by Iraqi CERP enabled we as the battlespace owners to reduce violence by over 80%. The unit previous to us sustained over 20 U.S. [killed in action], we sustained 4 U.S. [killed in action]. As a method of facilitating non-lethal efforts coupled with lethal targeting of the enemy network, I believe CERP changed the outcome of the battle for Iraq" (Salah al-Din).

One-fifth of the commanders considered the level of violence specifically against U.S. or coalition forces as an important indicator of whether or not a CERP project was successful, and about 10% specifically considered the level of sectarian violence in their evaluations of project impact. CERP used to reduce sectarian violence suggests an emphasis on security for the population, while efforts to reduce violence against coalition forces emphasize force protection.

However, not all commanders agreed on the effectiveness of CERP in reducing violence. One commander noted that "Projects/Services alone equates to a reduction of violence and better security is a nonsensical idea" (Diyala). Another commander stated that "knowing you cannot 'kill your way' out of an insurgency, I felt we could attract more 'bees to honey' (CERP) vice vinegar (killing). I believe the CERP was the most effective weapon my unit had" (Ninewa). These differing perspectives are but one example of the variance among commanders' perceptions regarding CERP effectiveness.
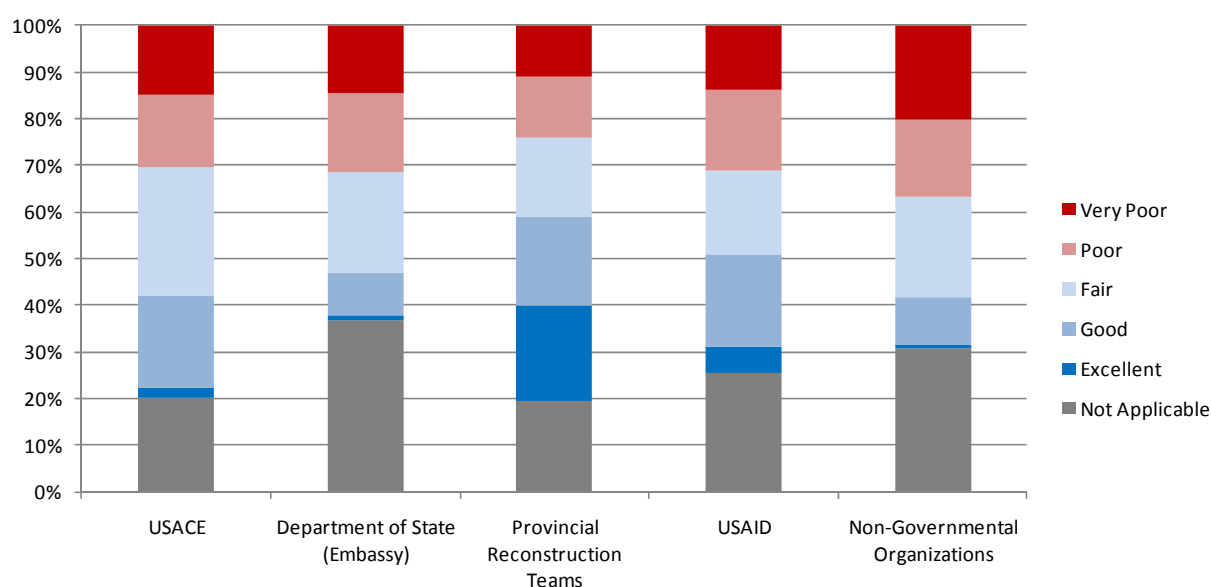
Interagency Coordination

We asked battalion commanders to evaluate the quality of their coordination with other organizations, commands, and host government bodies in Iraq that funded reconstruction and stabilization efforts in their areas of operation.

Survey responses demonstrated a strong awareness that successful interagency coordination is a necessary precondition for the success of stabilization and reconstruction efforts. Although responses suggested that coordination between military and civilian agencies improved over time, comments from both military and civilian personnel described persistent structural issues that impeded coordination and even prevented effective communication between agencies. Prior SIGIR reports have found that these challenges were exacerbated by the absence of a shared strategic vision and limited institutional capacity for integrating personnel and knowledge.

Commanders' evaluations of interagency coordination are shown in Figure 3. The volume of "Not Applicable" responses suggests that between one-fifth and approximately one-third of commanders either did not coordinate with the agencies listed or those other agencies were not visibly operating in a battalion commander's operational environment. With the exception of some highly rated coordination with Provincial Reconstruction Teams, less than half of the commanders perceived their coordination with other agencies as either good or excellent.

Figure 3—Percentage Distribution of Battalion Commanders' Assessments of Interagency Coordination within and Outside the Military

In their written comments, commanders frequently noted the lack of coordination with other agencies, in particular USACE and USAID. One wrote about a general "lack of coordination and willingness of DoS and USAID to get involved stifled true progress" (Baghdad, 2006-2007). Another similarly said that the "lack of coordination between [military] and state/USAID was a grave concern. Within the military, [maneuver units] and Corps of Engineers lacked coordination also" (Salah al-Din).

Battalion commanders complained about the effects of a lack of interagency coordination:

- The lack of coordination resulted in "projects [that] often competed, overlapped," (Baghdad and Diyala).

- Interagency coordination is necessary to prevent "mom against dad programs for money competition" (Ninewa).

- Reconstruction efforts "could have been better coordinated with the [non-governmental organizations] and DoS to have a holistic plan for reconstruction that actually had metrics and purpose for each service" (Baghdad, 2003-2004).

- The lack of coordination with DoS and USAID "hindered my ability to effectively integrate my efforts to a more long range and overarching national strategy but I believe that improved over time" (Ninewa).

USAID and USACE Coordination

About 30% of commanders rated their coordination with USACE as poor or very poor, and 32% rated their coordination with USAID as poor or very poor. Coordination between USAID and the battalion commanders steadily increased over time, with 85% of the commanders who served post-surge indicating that they worked with USAID to carry out reconstruction and stabilization initiatives.

Several commanders complained that USAID and USACE projects were too large or were planned in areas that were not sufficiently secure to sustain project completion. Consequently, unfinished or non-functional projects negatively impacted stability. Commanders stated that they believed these projects failed because of interagency mismanagement. Survey responses typically struck the following tone:

- "USAID started huge projects and did not supervise the work through to completion. They started projects in areas they were unwilling to go out into and thus did not understand the environment enough to realize they were being taken to the cleaners and in some cases actually increasing the civil violence. Same can be said for USACE" (Baghdad, 2008-2009).

- Projects often "failed as millions of dollars were flooded into the war zone for construction. USACE and USAID in particular had no idea of what was going on [at] most of their construction projects… I often found USACE and USAID projects that were wasted and left unfinished as they had not been properly inspected nor were they tied in to any sustainment plans or the local council. Huge multimillion dollar projects were marked as "completed" by USACE in particular but were often not connected to [the] local power grid, had no sewage or water hook ups, and often not used as intended if at all" (Baghdad and Diyala).

- "Although [the brigade combat team] had a great relationship and system of project management/oversight with the PRT/USAID we found it nearly impossible to coordinate similar efforts with USACE and their big ticket projects; and not for a lack of trying by the [brigade combat team]. The net result was an un-synchronized approach to the whole MAAWS concept in Ninewa province" (Ninewa).

- USAID was always on their own FTX [Field Training Exercise], often duplicating efforts or getting caught up in extreme waste/fraud/abuse situations due to…little…synchronization with the [operational environment] owner" (Salah al-Din).

Coordination with Department of State

About 37% of battalion commanders reported that they did not coordinate with the embassy at all and reported that coordination was 'Not Applicable' to their experience. Only 8% rated their coordination as excellent or good and 32% said their coordination with the embassy was either "poor" or "very poor."

Commanders' evaluations of the quality of coordination with PRTs were more positive. About 38% described it as either good or excellent; 17% rated their coordination as being fair; and 24% reported poor or very poor coordination (Figure 3). About 81% reported coordinating their efforts with PRTs (64% pre-surge and 93% during and after the surge).

Despite generally positive assessments of the quality of coordination with PRTs, Commanders provided mixed assessments on whether this coordination actually produced improved use of CERP funds.

- "ePRTs (Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams) were never on the same sheet as the brigades and battalions because they too refused to see with their own eyes the ramifications of the projects they started or supported. ePRT agendas were not in tune with the reality of the local population" (Baghdad, 2008-2009).

- "Felt very successful with our close nesting with the State Dept (ePRTs)" (Salah al-Din).

- "The ePRT in central and western Al Anbar province was absolutely instrumental in the nomination, development, and execution of CERP projects [but the] provincial PRT was an absolute hindrance" (Anbar).

- "ePRTs were never on the same sheet as the brigades and battalions" (Baghdad, 2008-2009).

Agency Coordination Improved

The percentage of commanders who rated interagency coordination as being 'very poor' decreased significantly over time. Those who described their coordination with the embassy as 'very poor' decreased from 33% pre-surge to 12% post-surge. Over the same time period, the percentage of commanders who described their coordination with USAID as very poor dropped from 32% to 9%. About 41% of commanders said their coordination with non-governmental organizations was very poor before the surge; only 15% made that assessment post-surge.

The perceived improvement in coordination over time may have stemmed from an increased presence of DoS personnel involved in reconstruction efforts. Those who served on earlier deployments cited a lack of State Department involvement as the root cause of poor coordination:

- "Lack of… willingness of DoS and USAID to get involved" (Baghdad, 2006-2007).

- "The overall program needs to be better coordinated through the interaction of and the increasing role of the State Department" (Baghdad, 2004-2005).

- "Significant lack of trained and ready U.S. government representatives (DoS, USAID, etc…)" (Ninewa).

As the DoS presence increased post-surge, several commanders' commented that the coordination of efforts improved:

- "We felt very successful with our close nesting with the State Department (ePRTs) and our GOI contacts. Good cross-talk, communication and use of CERP as a driver of GOI processes proved highly successful for our [Task Force]" (Salah ad-Din).

- "Very confident that if I took the survey again for the time I served as a [Brigade Combat Team Deputy Commanding Officer] one year later answers would be markedly improved. Our relationship with PRT/USAID was vastly better, and I personally led a weekly MAAWS audit meeting attended by targeters, brigade legal, [battalion representatives] to insure we were on track, aware, and disciplined" (Baghdad and Anbar).

Fraud and Corruption

About 76% of those surveyed estimated that at least some of the money their battalions spent on CERP was lost to fraud and corruption. However, there was disagreement on the extent to which corruption negatively impacted the effectiveness of CERP.

About 28% of those surveyed said they believed that the amount lost to fraud and corruption equaled less than 10% of funds spent; 35% estimated that between 10 and 25% was lost; 10% estimated that between 25 and 50% of the money was lost; and 3% estimated that more than 50% was lost to fraud and corruption. The highest levels of fraud and corruption reported were in Baghdad before and during the surge. Figure 4 provides more detailed information on the amount of fraud respondents believed occurred during their deployment.

Figure 4—Percentage of CERP Funds Lost to Fraud and Corruption by Time of Deployment
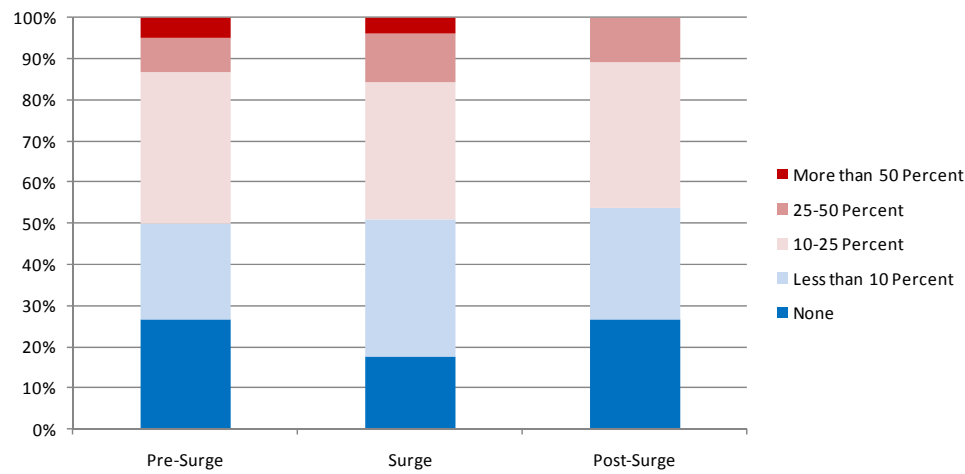
Commanders sometimes perceived the corruption as simply the price of doing business in Iraqi culture while others saw it as a significant impediment to U.S. goals. Several respondents asserted that reconstruction money may have ended up in the hands of insurgents. Many suggested best practices to mitigate corruption. These included focusing efforts on projects that were smaller in size and scope and structuring payments to ensure the on-time completion of larger projects. Commanders underscored the importance of a secure environment to allow proper and sustained oversight to better ensure success and minimize fraud and corruption.

Some respondents noted specific indicators of fraud and corruption. Several cited intelligence on kickbacks to GOI and Iraqi Security Force leaders from construction companies. Others cited the Sons of Iraq program as prone to corruption. Several also claimed that project money went to organized criminals or local thugs.

Corruption Endemic and Accepted

There was general agreement about the endemic nature of corruption in Iraq, summarized by one commander as follows: "Corruption is an integral feature of Iraqi society and politics. Battling corruption in the Iraqi system is a Sisyphean task… It was generally understood and accepted as common practice" (Ninewa). Another commander framed Iraqi practice in terms that might be more familiar to an American audience, "[c]ultural bias to bakshish–it was common, trickle down corruption. Think Sopranos" (Baghdad, 2007-2008).

One respondent argued that "applying U.S. standards for anti-corruption and accountability of funds to Iraqi culture does not work and hindered our ability to make progress" (Diyala). In fact, several other responses reframed fraud and corruption as an acceptable cost of doing business:

- "When you pay $40,000 to a contractor to have a well dug and 10% goes to the contractor, and 10% more goes to the local tribal leader, we call that corruption. But that was the cost of getting things done. I never saw U.S. personnel commit fraud, but in Iraqi culture, there were many hidden costs" (Anbar).

- "This [question about fraud and corruption] is WAY too broad. I believe that money was accurately accounted for at our battalion and brigade levels. I do believe that money was 'built into contracts' for local security and protection that equaled about 10%. Contractors were aware of this and it was customary in Iraq. If they were squeezed for more money...we heard about it. However, I do not believe this was corruption any more than certain practices in the U.S. Perspectives matter." (Baghdad, 2005-2006).

- "Anticipate an additional 10-25% cost of all projects [beyond the Independent Government Cost Estimate] to be the "norm" for getting people to work in a risky/hazardous environment and for navigating through several areas with materials to the project sites" (Baghdad, 2006-2008).

- "I believe that contractors that were used for certain projects were required to pay off Iraqi officials. Incidents occurred when these contractors did not payoff officials, such as threats and attacks. Additionally, some Iraqi officials, political and military, attempted to force us to use certain contractors. The assumption was that these contractors were providing kickbacks to the Iraqi officials" (Ninewa).

Fraud and corruption were linked to the inability to adequately monitor projects which "must have mechanisms in place to guarantee quality of work [which is] probably hard to do adequately until a security apparatus is in place" (Baghdad, 2005).

These "hidden costs" costs sometimes associated with CERP did not necessarily negate the benefits of the program. One commander said that he "didn't believe it would cost a Sheik [$15,000] to drill a well. But the well got dug, people got water for the first time in a couple of years, and there was money in the Sheik's pocket to take care of the elderly and infirmed who looked to him for support. Everyone was happy and the sheik regained his status, and attacks dropped precipitously" (Anbar).

Corruption often prevented the completion and delivery of a quality project. Several commanders described projects that were repeatedly delayed or even remained unfinished despite payment for labor and materials. A common complaint was that contractors would use substandard materials, hire unskilled labor, and fail to complete work to contract specifications. "The use of local contractors…created some difficulty in terms of an on-time, quality product. At times, this required additional work to bring up to standard" (Baghdad, 2008-2009).

Lack of Coordination with Other Agencies and Higher Headquarters Led to Fraud and Waste

Some commanders noted that headquarters-driven projects led to fraud and corruption.

- "The majority, if not all, of this fraud and corruption I believe occurred in those higher headquarters-directed projects which were executed or planned for my battalion area of operations. USAID routinely reported cleaning campaigns in my neighborhood which I never saw executed (I would learn of these supposed campaigns during District Council meetings)" (Baghdad, 2006-2007).

- "Coordination with USACE, USAID, [non-governmental organizations] and units was poor, but the few times that we did establish contact we identified several projects where local units were double (or triple) dipping the same project to multiple agencies—they

were paid by multiple agencies to do the same project. Better coordination can identify this without the appearances of the Military taking over all projects" (Baghdad, 2006-2008).

Another respondent was critical of his division headquarters for pressuring his battalion to do projects that were larger in size and scope than he felt he had the expertise or manpower to effectively manage. "There is no way the money we spent on the major contracts foisted on us by [division headquarters] were paid to the contractors at fair market value for the work performed. The biggest problem was that most of my large projects were construction projects, and it never occurred to the contracting officials to put in place any sort of controls—[Quality Assurance/Quality Control] inspectors, percentage of completion payments, etc.—all that was on me as a [battalion commander], with no requisite expertise. It was just 'get it done!' without regard to consequences" (Baghdad, 2007-2009).

One respondent acknowledged the challenges that military units faced in their ability to manage projects:

- "Between Iraqi corruption and U.S. military ignorance most of the money was wasted or at least not well spent. That is not a crack on the military leadership. A guy spends 19-24 years to become a lethal combat leader and then gets a bunch of projects, money, and concepts dumped into his lap with a tactical [Judge Advocate General] guy in the staff and an engineer who probably never spent any time in the Corps or on a real project managing millions of dollars of money… [Division] wised up a bit and started putting limits or making the thresholds tougher to get through but the projects just got smaller and more of them as the Iraqi's got smarter on how to milk the [brigade and battalion commanders] out of cash" (Salah al-Din).

However, another felt that there were too many restrictions on their discretion in allocating and managing CERP funds:

- "CERP is a great tool for the commander to affect the [counterinsurgency] environment—don't limit it based on a few bad examples. I know it helped me win my fight in…Baghdad, without [CERP], it would have been a different fight. Amounts could be higher for [battalion commander] approval—always amazed me that I was entrusted with the sons and daughters of our citizens, but could only approve a couple grand in CERP money" (Baghdad, 2008).

Reducing Fraud and Corruption through Oversight and Management of Project Size

Several commanders suggested that focusing efforts on projects that are smaller in size and scope could reduce levels of fraud and corruption. One commented that he concentrated his efforts on completing a limited number of smaller projects to ensure adequate management and oversight. "We spent very little money during my time as a [battalion commander] we spent our efforts on small and focused projects. From what I observed as a [Major/Lieutenant Colonel] on my first rotation to Baghdad, indicators of fraud begin with the size of a project or the number of projects a unit undertakes. U.S. Forces/leaders have a tough time in the oversight, quality control, and assurance between productivity vs. dollars spent on large projects over $500,000, projects that take a long time, or projects stemming from unsolicited or un-competitive bids. Finally,

battalions and brigades can oversee a limited number of projects and the unit has to have continuous access to the developer/contractor and the work site/project in order to minimize the risk of fraud" (Thi-Qar).

Some respondents commented on the need to develop enhanced internal controls such as routine payment structures and consistent oversight:

- "I think it would improve transparency/reduce corruption if we could get a spend plan. Understand the companies need to make a profit, but we should get some type of spend plan that allows us to make sure we can supervise the company allocating appropriate resources to support the project" (Ninewa).

- "All greenhouses and drip irrigation were small projects that were easily monitored for completion. Civic cleanup was managed and overseen by troop commanders and their [representatives] and easily monitored. All large complex problems; water treatment facility, etc, was left to the experts in the PRT" (Diyala).

- "Somewhat naïve to say 'none'[of the money spent] was lost to fraud…losing small amounts to fraud to serve important long-term goals is probably acceptable; goal should be none, but reality is to [put in place] measures to properly monitor money and minimize fraud" (Baghdad, 2007-2008).

- "Each project required more direct supervision than we could afford to provide" (Baghdad, 2005-2006).

Battalion commanders' comments suggested that larger contracts that require multiple contractors or subcontractors were particularly vulnerable to fraud and corruption. Several described instances where contractors manipulated the subcontract award process to systematically benefit those with particular political or tribal affiliations. One respondent used as an indicator of the level of fraud and corruption "the number of times a contract was sub-contracted within a tribe or not allowed to be given to a certain company/tribal affiliation" (Salah al-Din). Having multiple subcontractors made tracking project costs more difficult:

- "Iraqi companies bid on projects, then sub-contracted work" (Baghdad, 2005).

- The "practice of Iraqi contractors to sub-contract portions of work projects [was one] which caused great frustration in the vetting and tracking of money and payments" (Kirkuk).

- "While we delivered an acceptable product on most CERP projects, there were vulnerabilities to contractors selling contracts after award by our HQ. In those cases, the bid price was certainly higher than what the sub-contractor was receiving from the prime resulting in increased cost" (Baghdad, 2008-2009).

Survey responses suggested that not everyone observed limited competition, particularly those whose deployments were before or during the surge. One commander described his battalion's monitoring and oversight of a competitive contract bidding and award process as follows: "knowing the cost of the project efforts, we conducted routine surveys of laborers using local nationals to how much laborers were being paid, determine the cost of materials, distance travelled to deliver materials, and if security was required to mitigate material loss or provide

security to the laborers at the job sites. We used these cost figures as part of our Independent Government Cost Estimate and applied that to a competitive bid process" (Baghdad, 2006-2008).

Among commanders who completed projects valued at $10,000 or less, more than 80% estimated that less than 10% of money spent on CERP projects was lost to fraud and corruption. Of commanders who had at least one project in excess of $500,000, only about 34% estimated that less than 10% of the money spent on CERP projects was lost. This relationship between project budget size and the estimated level of fraud and corruption suggests that larger budgets are associated with higher levels of fraud and corruption and is statistically significant.

Figure 5—Commanders' Perceptions of the Percentage of CERP Funds Lost to Fraud and Corruption, by Maximum Single-Project Budget
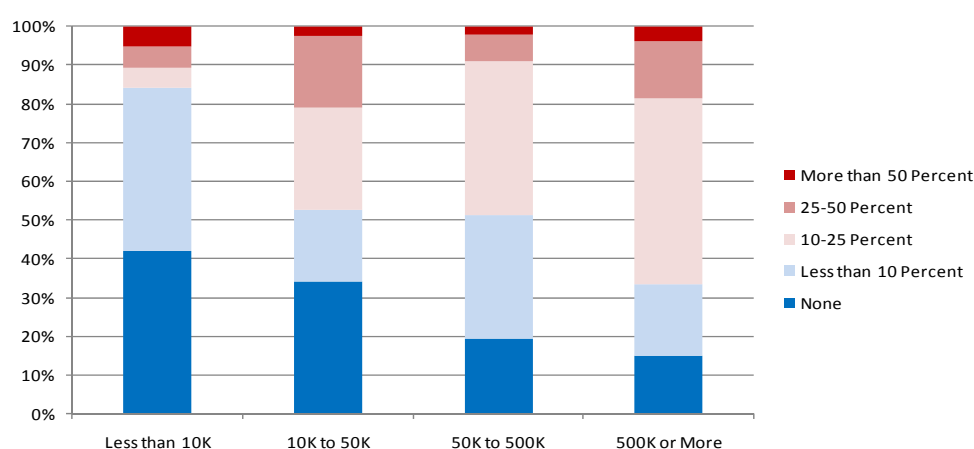
CERP Corruption May Have Benefitted Insurgents

Some commanders indicated that the diversion of CERP project funds may have benefitted insurgents. One commander noted: "GOI Authorities would get a cut of the CERP funding directly from the contractor. CERP contractors understood the system. This type of corruption needs to be compared with funding that was reinvested in insurgent activity or paid to disgruntled leaders of communities susceptible to insurgent support. The first is commonplace and expected; the second does make money a weapon system–given to insurgents" (Kirkuk).

Other respondents observed:

- "Money was paid to insurgents for protection—some of this money (usually new U.S. $100 dollar bills) was found during raids on insurgents [along with] admission from contractors that they paid money 'for protection'" (Baghdad, 2005-2006).

- "There was substantial evidence that the local authorities (Government/Security and Military Forces) were stealing right off the top. Additionally, governors were offering insurgents money that was to pay for CERP activities to NOT attack certain CERP-funded programs" (Diyala).

- "When tribes charge a contractor a fee to access an area, for security, etc...in some cases it helped us figure out who were the tribes with Al Qaeda ties or those involved in illegal

activity were in our areas and would go out of our way to make sure this type of activity was not tolerated" (Najaf).

Insecurity Provides Opportunity for Corruption and Fraud

Respondents noted a link between the insecure environment and opportunities for fraud and corruption:

- "Use of CERP for other than truly essential needs or to provide security should not be used until a secure environment exists or else the chance of fraud/corruption increases exponentially" (Ninewa).

- We "must have mechanisms in place to guarantee quality of work [which is] probably hard to do adequately until a security apparatus is in place" (Baghdad, 2005).

- "The fact is we could get nobody else to build the projects—that is the price you will pay in a non-secured environment" (Qadissiya).

Other Agency Reconstruction Officials' Perceptions of CERP

This section contains a summary analysis of USMC battalion commanders, State Department PRT leaders, USAID PRT members, and USACE officials' perspectives of CERP. Although these offices used varying sources of Iraq reconstruction funding, they operated in the same environment, facing many of the same challenges as Army battalion commanders.
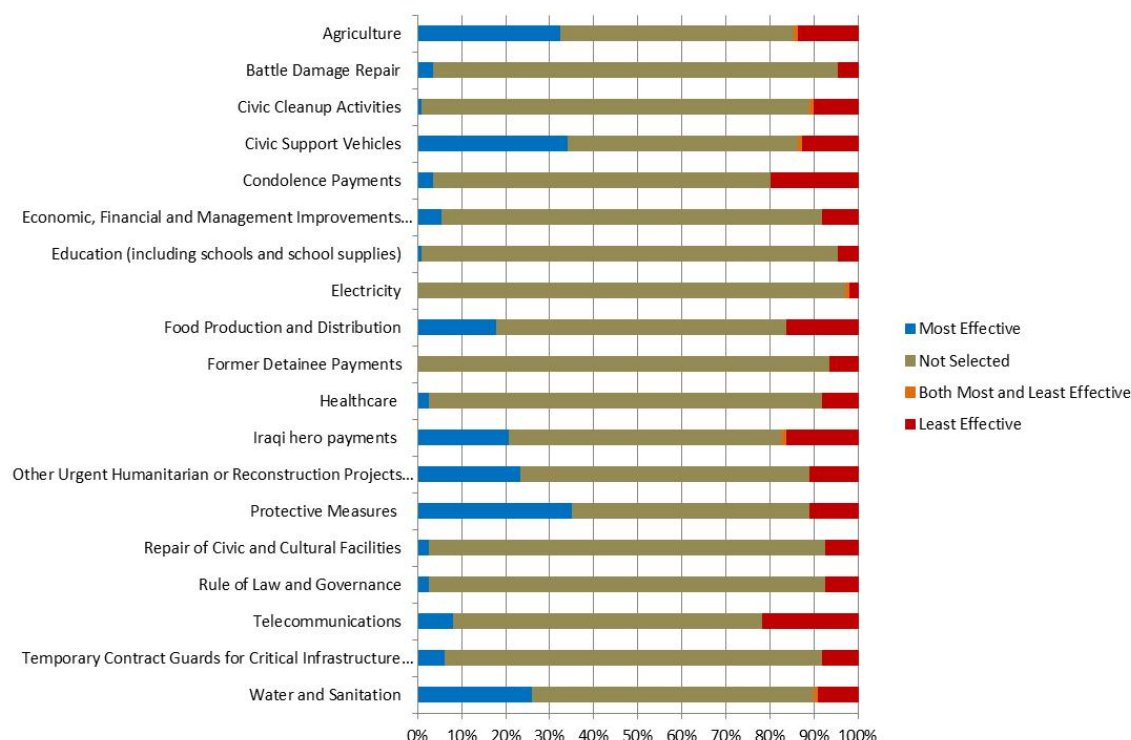
Types of Projects Selected and Intended Outcomes

Responses from Marine battalion commanders, USAID representatives, PRT leaders, and USACE personnel told much the same story as the Army battalion commanders. The survey found that there was no single use of CERP that was effective across all provinces and all time periods, although there were some projects that appeared to have been consistently unsuccessful among those surveyed. Figure 6 shows collective results from these respondents.

PRT leaders and USAID representatives generally agreed on the types of projects that were the most successful, while Marine battalion commanders and USACE officials generally concurred on the relative value of CERP activities:

- One quarter (25%) of Marine battalion commanders and one-third (34%) of USACE officials rated healthcare projects as being among the most effective projects. On the other hand, about one fifth (20%) of USAID and PRT officials identified healthcare projects as among the least effective uses of CERP.

- Rule of Law projects were overwhelmingly identified by USAID representatives and PRT leaders as being the most effective (64% and 48%, respectively), while Marine battalion commanders and USACE engineer comments were not as positive.

- USAID and State Department employees were overwhelmingly positive about micro-grants, while Marine battalion commanders and USACE engineers were less likely to identify these among the most successful projects.

Metrics Used To Measure Effectiveness

Several respondents stressed the importance of flexibility in how objectives were defined and measured, saying that "Success/impact should be measured differently depending on the situation at the time and the objectives" (USAID, Baghdad, 2007-2008). Others recognized the need for flexibility but expressed frustration at the absence of commonly defined metrics. "While units shouldn't be discouraged from developing metrics, anything I developed lacked historical context. I couldn't tell if I was making a difference or just doing what everyone before me did—build schools and clinics despite the lack of teachers and doctors… Without policy and viable, long term metrics your [reconstruction and stabilization] efforts will be disjointed and difficult to prioritize." (Marine, Anbar).

As with Army battalion commanders, Marines and PRT officials commonly utilized violence reduction as a chief metric to assess effectiveness. When the purpose of CERP was framed as a tool for reducing violence, CERP was often characterized as being effective.

Marine battalion commanders identified CERP as critical to mission success. One believed CERP was an important tool in reducing his unit's casualties: "It was absolutely vital to what we were doing in [our operational environment] in 2007 and contributed to the following statistic: the battalion we relieved…had experienced 22 killed and several hundred wounded in their 7 months [in Iraq]. We had 3 [killed] and 25 wounded in the first 5 weeks, then we got it all to

stop due to the operation we conducted. We only had two lightly wounded the rest of the deployment. CERP funds were a major part of that operation" (Marine, Anbar).

One USAID representative identified saving lives as a CERP priority but also cautioned that, to achieve that objective, some fiscal risks were necessary: "Stewardship of [U.S. government] resources is of course paramount as we program stabilization funds but it is also important to realize the objective for stability expenditure is to save our soldiers lives. Often getting things going quickly to accomplish that objective (saving lives) has some inherent fiscal accountability risks. It is very difficult to implement and monitor development programs in a war zone and I think we need to limit this kind of programming which has longer term and broader financial implications. Implementing successful development programs is challenging even in areas not experiencing active warfare" (USAID, Anbar).

A few Marine leaders characterized CERP as an important means for connecting their message to Iraqis with concrete actions:

- "CERP funds were CRITICAL for our Battalion to be able to back up what we said our purpose for being there was with actions that reinforced the message. I believe our success in growing a local police force and establishing local governance was linked to this synergy in strategic communication, which required both words and action on our part and was enabled with CERP in many instances" (Marine, Anbar).

- "CERP was exceptionally valuable to me during my time in Iraq because it allowed my battalion to put our money where our mouth was. We always tried to combine battalion counterinsurgency activities with CERP expenditures designed to improve that overall situation in a targeted area" (Marine, Anbar).

Making this point even more directly, one USACE engineer suggested:

- "Measuring effectiveness of reconstruction funds with a focus on metrics of effectiveness—when applied to the mission of PRTs and Capacity Building—is extremely challenging at best. Reconstruction funding—having access to [dollars] and control/influence in the project 'approval' process—gave the PRT itself credibility and 'access' to provincial government officials. That access and legitimate 'business' interaction with Provincial Council members provided a working medium with which to develop governance capacity-completely separate and distinct from the impact/effectiveness of the reconstruction projects themselves. Put another way, without reconstruction funding, the provincial government would have paid little heed to what the PRT wanted to do. We had to bring something to the table—aside from intangibles like 'additional skill/competence' in their ability to perform—in order that they would genuinely engage with us. Reconstruction funds provided that 'something'—it got us a seat at the provincial table, and it allowed the provincial officials to 'demonstrate' that they were, indeed, doing something for their population" (USACE, Ninewa).

Apart from the violence reduction metric, respondents' claims about the effectiveness of CERP tended toward the general:

- "I feel that my year in Anbar accomplished a lot. I am morally certain that our activities saved lives, Iraqi and American" (ePRT, Anbar).

- "I highly recommend that PRTs be given limited project funds to implement projects (small amounts directly and larger amounts through an implementing partner). The most effective single program of interventions I observed in Iraq was the voter education effort implemented by [Iraq Rapid Assistance Program] in the run up to the 2009 Provincial Elections. Over 300,000 Iraqi citizens participated in voter education activities and millions more were reached through media and billboards" (USAID).

- "The guy on the ground needs to have the 'pocket money' and be trusted to use it appropriately for small, quick wins" (Marine, Anbar).

Interagency Perception and Coordination

Although coordination improved, achieving coordination among members of different agencies required a considerable amount of effort and compromise. Survey responses suggested that coordination between military and civilian agencies and non-governmental organizations presented great challenges.

Marine Battalion Commanders

Marine commanders typically reported excellent coordination with their regimental headquarters, but their coordination with division headquarters was far less positive.

For those who engaged with the civilian and non-government agencies approximately 63% of Marines who served pre-surge reported that their coordination with the Embassy, USAID, or non-governmental organizations was either very poor or fair. During and after the surge Marine commanders more consistently reported that they coordinated efforts with DoS, USAID, and the PRTs, however, they rated coordination with non-governmental organizations as poor.

While the responses suggested that coordination between Marine and civilian officials in the field improved over time, the comments nevertheless highlighted the continued lack of inter-departmental coordination:

- "With all the various types of money used for stabilization…the processes [need to be] streamlined. In order to more effectively integrate all these resources we need to first have an integrated campaign objective/goal that everyone knows, and all projects need to nest inside these previously agreed upon objectives." When there is not coordination and nesting, "the delays in approval, the duplication of resources, the building of infrastructure without the concomitant civil capacity became a waste of resources and time" (Marine, Anbar).

- "The PRTs, while effective, also serve to provide a point of fracture for U.S./Coalition influence, as the national/local officials very quickly realize that they can petition multiple commanders for projects" (Marine, Anbar).

- "I felt there were too many uncoordinated 'projects' being worked by too many organizations—as a [battalion commander] it was often hard to see the comprehensive

strategy...if there was one. There was also a huge disparity between what the Marines were paying [Sons of Iraq] in Al Anbar and what the Army was paying in other provinces (Army was significantly higher). This caused a lot of angst amongst the SOI" (Marine, Anbar).

USACE

USACE engineers were clear about the need for all agencies to share common goals and objectives. However, their responses indicated that these conditions did not always exist.

One engineer with more than two decades experience pointed out that, beyond the challenges presented by the local physical and political environment, "there were many challenges with DoS, USAID, and military chains as well" (Provincial Reconstruction Engineer, Salah Al-Din). Another engineer explained that the "greatest disconnect I observed is that there was no [common operating picture] between what land owning [brigade combat team] was doing and what the Corps was doing. [There were] two different sets of priorities" (USACE, Baghdad). Another engineer who served in Iraq for five years wrote that interagency coordination was impeded by the way that projects were funded, how agency personnel were trained, and how project information was stored and shared between agencies. He identified three requirements for success: 1) common funding, 2) unity of effort, and 3) a common operating picture.

PRT Leaders

The majority of PRT leaders who served during and after the surge reported excellent coordination with the unit with which they were embedded:

- "All my success depended on cooperation with the Marines and I believe that some of their success was contributed by my team" (ePRT Leader, Anbar).

- "Our PRT cooperation with U.S. military and GOI counterparts was excellent, but largely a product of willing and capable personalities."

- "the first priority would have [been] stabilization and decrease of violence against U.S. troops…the well-led brigade to which we were attached had already pacified [activity] through kinetic and non-kinetic activities to the point they sustained zero casualties in the first 6 months of the year" (ePRT Leader, Baghdad, 2007-2008).

PRT leader evaluations of interagency coordination were not consistently positive, nor did they shy away from criticizing the brigades with whom they worked most closely:

- "Close collaboration should be an institutional prerequisite for future civilian-military joint undertakings in conflict zones" (PRT Leader, Ninewa).

- "Better coordination between funding agencies and harmonizing civilian and military goals should be the top priority" (ePRT Leader, Baghdad, 2009).

Coordination between the PRT and the military was complicated by a lack of agreement on metrics and differences between the life cycle of projects and the cycle of military deployments. The ePRT leader who was embedded with the "well-led brigade" noted "the litter of unfinished or finished and abandoned [projects] throughout Baghdad was due to a large extent by the input

metrics favored by the military and the overly ambitious and strategic output metrics favored by State and AID" (ePRT Leader, Baghdad, 2007-2008).

Nearly half of PRT leaders (48%) rated their coordination with the Embassy as 'Fair' or worse. Similar to Army battalion commanders, who described the challenges of locating their project efforts in a broader context of reconstruction and stabilization, one PRT leader noted the "poor direction from Baghdad, lack of standardized policy on events in the region and misplaced priorities. Virtually no money or centralized effort to change education or health care and our band-aid approach in the field could not dent the issues. We failed to focus on what the people wanted/needed and in place substituted what we [military/DoS/AID/non-governmental organizations] wanted to do" (PRT Leader, Kirkuk).

Others noted difficulties in being expected to manage projects over which another organization had control to approve and provide funding, and within a timeframe appropriate for addressing needs on the ground:

- "We spent much less on projects than other PRT's because we lacked access to CERP, because we had difficulty getting the Embassy to approve many of our projects, because the need was less, and because we spent much of our time on traditional diplomatic activity rather than projects" (PRT Leader, Erbil).

- "Most of the monies spent by our ePRT were provided by the military because [DoS] provided monies were not flexible enough to respond to needs in the field" (ePRT Leader, Anbar).

Coordination was further complicated by personnel rotations:

- "Too much money wasted due to the rapid turnover of personnel on the [military] side, as I witnessed projects that were done three times due to new troops arriving… Use of money to supplant knowledge and time does not work. Understanding a developmental strategy or approach cannot be measured in 30-60-90 days. At least in Kirkuk we were the first to join the Brigade in a single unified strategy and approach to gain traction on short term and long term goals. Lots of failure, lots of success, lots of pain, and we were probably the most successful in teaching the real lessons to the Iraqis and not just providing window dressing. Overall, the effort could have been much better, but when you engage in 12-month cycles, you never have the time to fully achieve all of your goals. Staffing is also one of the main factors in success or failures" (PRT Leader, Kirkuk).

USAID Representatives

Although USAID representatives generally rated interagency coordination as positive, their comments were not uniformly upbeat. Several acknowledged that stabilization and development projects had a positive impact, but, similar to responses gathered from Army and Marine battalion commanders and PRT Leaders, many USAID representatives attributed positive working relationships and outcomes to personal dedication rather than institutional coordination:

- "I was fortunate to work with a brigade commander that demonstrated every day his willingness to work with other [U.S. government] partners in stabilization operations…

He took risks in conflict mitigation working with the [U.S. Institute of Peace] that I found inspiring" (USAID, ePRT).

- "USAID should have had much more prevalence in decision-making but was often side-lined or contingent on the personality of the PRT leader" (USAID, PRT).

- "People who dreamed up projects were not experienced in development or how to make a project viable and sustainable. Much of my time was spent working with [the military] or State people trying to convince them of basic development principles. Because I had no authority as an advisor, I was very often ignored" (USAID, PRT).

The absence of a coherent shared vision or strategy for reconstruction and development efforts hindered operations. "The military civil affairs teams often confused the situation more as their priorities often were in direct conflict with PRT priorities" (USAID, PRT).

USAID representatives also expressed frustration at the lack of development expertise on the ground:

> "There was never a plan or strategy for what ePRTs or PRTs were to accomplish. Further, they were not managed, and evaluated by development professionals, but by diplomats and soldiers. This was a tragic and wasteful flaw, albeit an avoidable one. As a result, hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money was wasted… The Iraq PRT and ePRT system should be a primer on how NOT to operate in the future! The system was a total waste of taxpayer funds and a complete failure. While I am critical of the U.S. State Department leadership of the PRTs and waste of millions of dollars of Commander's Emergency Response Funds, I do not blame the personnel. Our military folks were outstanding. They were merely given a brief that completely exceeded their skills and training. Diplomats and warriors are not development professionals. Further, USAID staffing in Iraq was miserable. It was clear they did not have the ability to bring the right people for the job. But then again, they were the junior partner in the failing troika of [DoS], USAID and the military. On paper the system was flawed and in practice it was a disaster! Next time, you may consider not allowing the test takers to grade their own papers" (USAID, PRT).

GOI and Iraqi Citizen Involvement

The majority of respondents reported involving the Iraqi government, Iraqi citizens, or both in the project nomination process. USACE engineers, many of whom occupied district-level supervisory roles, most often reported coordinating with the Iraqi government. By contrast, Marine battalion commanders were more likely to report considering the concerns of local Iraqi citizens when nominating projects. Figure 7 shows the percentage of respondents by agency that considered GOI and Iraqi citizen requests in nominating reconstruction funding.

One USAID representative wrote: "[p]lease realize that the goals of our work evolved. Initially, the goal was counter-insurgency and stemming the violence. This included short-term, quick-fix projects. Once the violence subsided, the goal changed to longer-term, sustainable projects that required greater investment from our Iraqi counter-parts and private sector." This is not to say,

however, that coordinating with the Iraqi government and with Iraqi citizens is unimportant, because "I watched DoD waste a lot of money on projects that lacked buy-in from the Iraq government and private sector" (USAID, ePRT, Baghdad, 2007-2008).

Nearly one-third of USAID representatives who responded to the survey reported jointly considering GOI and citizen requests in the project nomination process. Their comments described their role as liaisons between the local population and the military. Counter to what might be expected, State Department PRT leaders were the most likely among those surveyed to report considering neither government nor citizen requests in the nomination process.

Figure 7—Percentage of Respondents by Agency that Considered GOI Requests, Iraqi Citizen Requests, Both, or Neither in Nominating Reconstruction Funding
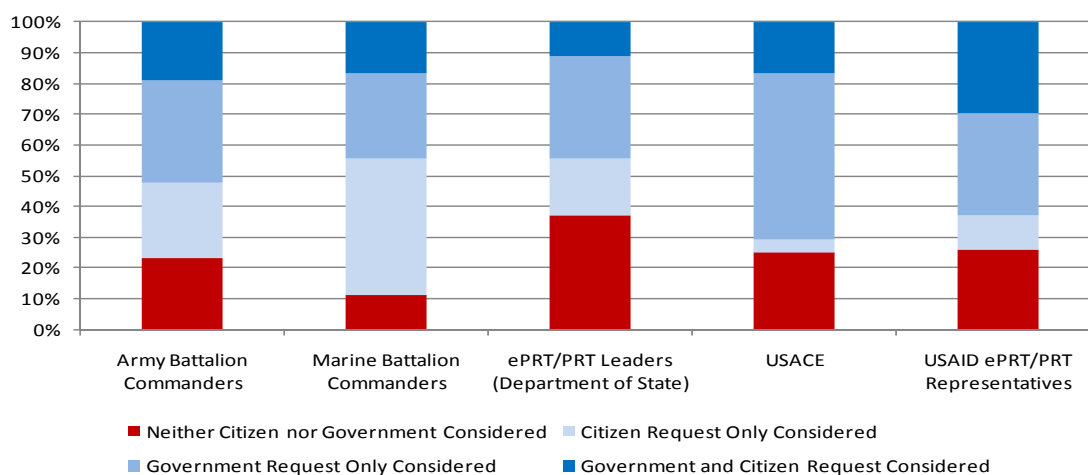
Respondents generally acknowledged the importance of coordinating with Iraqi citizens and GOI on the identification, approval, and completion of projects:

- "Whatever we applied CERP to, it had to be done in conjunction with local leadership—Sheik, City Council, Local police chiefs. It had to have a method of Iraqi sustainability and it had to be built into the local and provincial budgeting process or have private economic sustainability" (Marine, Anbar).

- "Iraqi leaders are often well-educated and know better than we do how things can work—we needed to work with those people not just shove something down a community's throat. I could go on and on about Embassy PRT funds and CERP. I would just like to say that, in a place like Iraq, the chances are high that much will not work. However, if that PRT and CERP funding had been channeled to broader development projects that supported Iraqi ownership, Iraqi accountability and sustainability, we would have wasted a lot less money" (USAID, PRT).

- "Required for success [is] host nation ownership…drives its own development needs and stabilization and reconstruction process [and] legitimacy [which is] the degree to which the population accepts the mission; the degree to which the government is accountable to its people, and the degree to which regional neighbors accept the mission." He goes on to say that where development is concerned, "build what they need; what they can sustain

and what they can build. Use local materials. Use local design standards—keep it simple" (USACE).

- "Often initiatives were undertaken with very little analysis or stakeholder consultation, it was very personality driven. For example, on one PRT the 'one laptop per child program' was pursued with the PRT sending folks to Boston for training. While noble in its effort the device did not support Arabic and in my opinion did not achieve its intended impact, especially when basic literacy and numeracy were the challenges faced by most primary school children. Another project sought to build a bridge to a mosque over a rather small canal. It put people to work constructing the bridge but overall it really wasn't the type of project needed for that community. In general, the short assignments of PRT reps made projects very personality driven, not to mention contingent on the flavor of the month from Washington" (USAID, PRT).

USACE engineers' comments typically highlighted the importance of taking into account the physical and economic environment. One district commander noted: "I was deployed twice (2005, 2008). The reconstruction effort was much more effective in 2008 than my experience in 2005. Thought needs to be put toward what are the basic needs and what can the country sustain after we turn projects over to them. Western construction standards (porcelain sinks) quickly deteriorated compared to basic forms (steel trough sink). [It is necessary to] determine what the basic functions are and design accordingly (industrial grade). Many projects were not functioning six months after completion due to a lack of [operations and maintenance] budget from the Iraqi Ministry (fuel for generators, chemicals for water purification)" (USACE).

Many of the respondents who shared stories about "lessons learned" talked specifically about electricity projects that were not properly vetted through Iraqi officials and subsequently fell into disuse or disrepair. These stories are of interest, given that Marines, USACE officials, and civilian leaders identified electricity projects as priority projects for CERP funding. Respondents reported that projects designed to generate electrical power sometimes incorporated technologies that were inappropriate for the conditions in Iraq. One PRT leader explained that although "we understood that it was a solution only if it was an Iraqi solution... we also tried to be too American and too PC. Iraqis had different priorities. One example—we tried to build solar energy. It didn't work because of the dust. The Iraqis wanted diesel" (ePRT Leader, Anbar).

One USAID representative pointed out that due to cost, even gasoline-powered electrical generators were of limited utility: "All the money spent on small electrical generators was a waste. We spend even more money paying for fuel. When we would go back to check, none of the generators were actually in use. For all the billions we spent on 1.5 to 5 KW gasoline generators, we could have built one 200 MW diesel powered thermal power plant" (USAID, ePRT, Baghdad, 2007-2009).

USACE engineers commented on the need for coordination with the Iraqi government in a way that would support large-scale infrastructure improvements. Getting short-term buy-in for individual projects was not a substitute for collaboratively developing a long-term plan. One USACE engineer expressed continued reservations about rehabilitating the electrical grid, even though he identified that as one the uses of CERP. "I have very mixed emotions about the return on investment that the U.S. taxpayer got or is getting for his investment in Iraqi reconstruction.

For example, we committed several million dollars to [Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition] management tools to watch an immature electrical grid—did/does that make any tangible difference for a country whose demand far outstrips production and distribution numbers and potential for the coming decade?" (USACE).

These concerns were echoed by another engineer who worked as an Electrical Generation Sector Lead. He pointed out that while he was uncertain about whether or not there was money lost to fraud or corruption "I believe that some money was spent on old equipment that would have been better replaced. These generation systems that I speak of are almost to the end of their life in normal conditions" (USACE).

Fraud and Corruption

Marine battalion commanders, PRT leaders, USAID officials, and USACE officials reported that involving the Iraqi government in selecting projects resulted in more money being lost to fraud and corruption. As a USAID representative who served in Baghdad both during and after the surge noted, "[U.S.] agencies, such as [the] military, DoD, [and] DoS, trusted many Iraqis quickly and little vetting was done. GOI…always intended to take part but their officials are the most corrupted" (USAID, PRT, Baghdad, 2007-2009). These other respondents assessments of the extent of fraud and corruption are shown in Figure 8.

A PRT leader explained why it was sometimes more beneficial to coordinate with Iraqi citizens. "We found that the provincial Iraqi officials for the most part could not be trusted. We determined to channel as many programs and funding as possible directly to private Iraqi citizens so they would receive the benefits, have a stake in the democratic process, and think well of Americans. Based on input from Iraqis we knew, from beneficiaries, and from Iraqi officials we trusted, this proved to be an effective approach" (PRT Leader).

Figure 8—Respondents' Assessments of Percentage of Reconstruction Money Lost to Fraud and Corruption by GOI and Local Iraqi Involvement
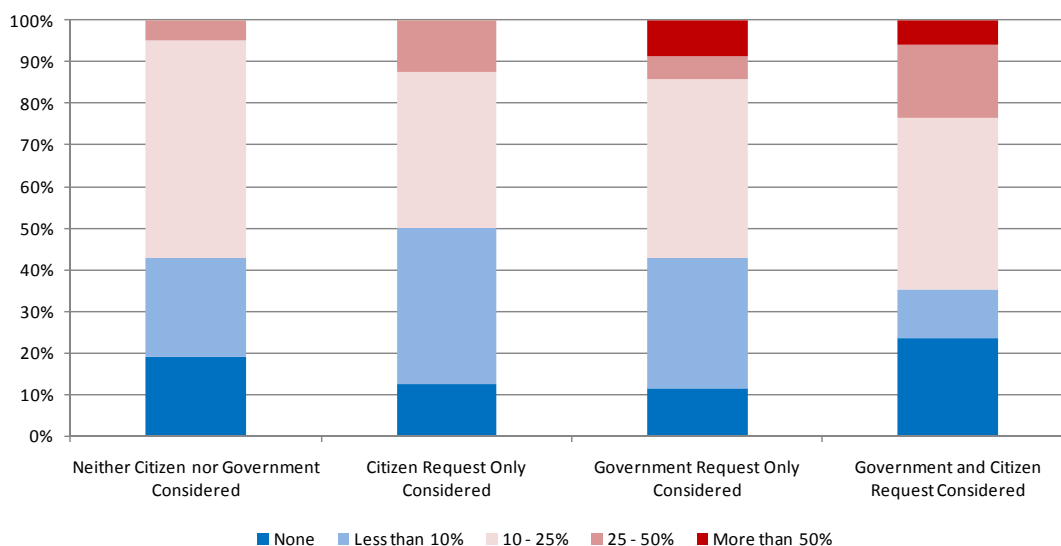
Some civilians called for working more closely with GOI officials as a means of reducing vulnerabilities to fraud and waste. A USAID representative wrote: "We should have increased transparency of the funding so that beneficiaries and local government authorities could help demand delivery of better products and services. Since few entities knew the cost of our projects, they assumed that contractors were ripping us off but could not help us demand greater quality/value of services. [Also] we should have worked closer with local council authorities, allowing them to help identify projects and [approve] awards. We assumed that they wanted to participate only so that they could direct our contracts to their friends—based on my experience this assumption was wrong. They too were interested in ensuring that their community/province received value for the USG funds spent. Those USAID programs like [Community Action Program 3] where many parties were actively engaged in the decision-making process and contract award resulted in obviously much greater value and/or lower costs. Most of our contracting specialists did not know the cost of doing business in [my province]" (USAID).

Offering another perspective, one Marine battalion commander pointed out that there is always a "cost of business" associated with development projects, but even if the cost didn't disappear, working with the government decreased that cost. "Routinely projects were awarded to cronies of the police chief, mayor, or others in power. This was so common as to be endemic to the system of CERP awards; it literally became part of the 'cost of doing business.' HOWEVER, over time, the 'cut' did decrease, as violence dropped and the perception that MAYBE some real governance could take seat and everyone did not necessarily need to grab what they could before things fell apart again. We were also fortunate to get a Mayor who, while he dispensed favors like an old-school politician, was smart enough to dispense them across a number of tribes and regions, and was not personally lining his pockets as badly as his predecessor, who had cooperated with [Al-Qaeda in Iraq] for personal (monetary) gain" (Marine, Anbar).

Importance of Oversight

Respondents recognized that adequate project oversight was critical to minimizing fraud and corruption but provided factors that impeded their ability to do so. As one USACE engineer explained, "due to the vast scale of our program, ($2.5B across all 6 sectors of development dispersed throughout southern Iraq in one year), not enough capacity (sheer numbers of inspectors) or ability (security limitations) to get enough [construction and project managers] eyes on the projects frequently enough" (USACE).

One Marine battalion commander explained, "some contractors tried to rip-off the program which required extensive oversight of the program to limit the theft of funds. In the end, monitoring and choice of contractors was critical to achieve the end state you were seeking. Like any weapon system, you have to monitor your round impacts, adjust fire, or switch weapon systems if you're not achieving the effects desired" (Marine, Anbar).

One USACE engineer provided a detailed illustration of how a presence on the job site and continued and repeated engagement with local leaders impacted project implementation and sustainability:

> "I felt (toward the end of my tour) that my insistence on 'better quality work' and acceptable fixtures and furniture had some effect, but reality was [the] only way I could

effect change was withholding funds until 'minimal standards met.' My concern was that the 'good fixtures/furniture' would be taken out once I accepted the project. To overcome this I insisted that the 'owners of the project/leaders who would occupy' accompany me on inspections, punch-list walk-throughs and acceptance walk-throughs. I would reinforce to them and Provincial leadership (Deputy Governor, Chief Engineer, provincial council members, and press when present) that this was minimum standard and that they needed to continue GOI sustainment funding and service contracts that the PRT insisted they put in place as part of the US funding for the project. Reality is we were trying to train them on how to run projects with their own funding which was becoming more prevalent than US funding in 2007" (USACE).

CERP Fraud May Have Benefited Insurgents

Both military and civilian personnel explained that local contractors might have been paying insurgents to ensure their security. One USACE resident engineer reported knowledge of fraud and corruption but "we had several areas where only one contractor was willing to bid on projects. We felt that these contractors were doing one or all of the following: 1) conspiring with the insurgency, 2) threatening other contractors, or 3) paying the insurgents to allow them to work in the area" (USACE).

Three of the fourteen Marine battalion commanders who described indicators of fraud and corruption specifically mentioned insurgents as the beneficiaries of the fraudulent practices; these commanders served both before and after the surge in Anbar. A fourth described a relationship he saw between the amount of money spent and strength of the insurgency: "we later found out that contractors were paying part of the money to the local insurgency for 'protection'. What percentage was always hard to tell, but the better we were at leveraging CERP, we saw a corresponding increase in the sophistication of enemy equipment and training" (Marine, Anbar).

Importance of a Secure Environment

Responses from Marine commanders, USACE officials, PRT leaders, and USAID PRT members all underscored the importance of establishing security in order to minimize corrupt and fraudulent practice and ensure the success of reconstruction efforts. Moreover, they recognized that an insecure environment would increase costs. To illustrate:

- One USACE district commander described how "contractors would provide anecdotal accounts of local threats requiring payoffs" (2008-2009), and another district commander observed "effort and dollars were spent on ensuring supplies flowed to the project site and security versus 'brick and mortar'" (USACE).

- Marine commanders described additional "overhead costs," associated with providing security. Several USAID representatives also reported the use of "funds [that] went to grossly overinflated cost estimates, funds used by contractors to 'buy' protection/security." (USAID, ePRT, Baghdad, 2007-2008).

- A USACE official noted that failure to secure the job site would result in additional monetary losses when threats led to violence, project desertion and cancellation. "We did

see many indicators of fraud and extortion with some of the contractors we hired. For example, we saw a lot of very poor construction quality by local contractors which required extensive oversight to fix...and in some cases extensive litigation. We also saw local contractors being extorted by local thugs to ensure the security of their projects, equipment, and personnel. Occasionally, we saw criminal activity...like one of our prime local contractors was murdered and robbed in broad daylight after he had received a substantial contract payment in cash; this caused several projects to shut down...therefore costing more in the end" (USACE).

The implementation of projects in unsecure areas presented challenges not just for local contractors but also for the civilian personnel charged with project monitoring and evaluation. As a result, money was being spent on projects without the requisite oversight that was critical to project success. The complexity of the relationship between security and success is reflected in the comments by another USACE engineer who highlighted the multiple connections between security, oversight, project completion, and costs:

"One of the biggest problems was monitoring projects with 'USACE eyes on.' The security environment and the great geographic dispersion of these projects plus the sheer number of projects often made it impossible to do more than cursory, irregular visits to any given project. Being unable to get to the projects and observe on a daily basis, we were forced to rely on progress reports and sometimes make payments for work that was difficult to verify had been completed let alone be able to verify the standard of quality. This was a huge frustration during my first tour. Often we would find we'd spent 50% of the money allocated to a project but the thing would only be 15% complete. However, by the time we figured this out the contractor building the project may have left, gone out of business, skipped town or been killed by insurgents with no way to recover the funds. At that point we would then have to go out and find another contractor to finish the job and expend funds to go through that process. Another critical factor was how the poor security situation in many areas caused costs to skyrocket, especially in 2004-07. Early on, we had no idea how expensive in terms of dollars it would be to provide security for projects or what our contractors would have to spend on security which sometimes amounted to bribing the local leaders" (USACE).

As one USACE engineer explained, "The American & Ex-pat contractors in PCO [Project Contracting Office] and their sector prime contracts meant well and were technically competent, but…once the insurgency began they were not willing to take physical risks. I visited PCO often and they were generally very out-of-touch with the reality of trying to do construction in the difficult environment in Iraq. The metric became 'number of project starts.' This was a foolish metric. It's quite easy to start a project; it's incredibly hard to finish one, particularly in Iraq" (USACE, Baghdad, 2004-2005). One PRT leader specifically cited as one cause of fraudulent practice "the PRT's limited ability to conduct due diligence on [Iraqi contracting] companies because of the security situation" (PRT Leader). Another described the "difficulty of monitoring projects in no-go areas" (PRT Leader).

Lessons for Consideration

Based on the broad range of reported perspectives, attitudes, and experiences reported by the respondents to the Survey on CERP efficacy, SIGIR identified ten lessons for consideration.

1. **Reduction in violence can be a useful and manageable tool for measuring CERP effectiveness.**

Reducing violence was the primary mover behind most CERP projects, with an improvement in security the most frequently used metric for determining success.

2. **Insufficient metrics and poor project selection complicates CERP's effect on capacity building.**

Where the reported CERP project goal was to increase government capacity, survey responses provided little evidence of a causal connection between what battalion commanders were trying to accomplish, what they spent money on, and the outcomes. If the intent of a project is something other than force protection, CERP managers should ensure the use of metrics that properly yield measureable results regarding the effects of the project.

3. **CERP projects can strengthen relationships with the host country.**

CERP was useful in Iraq in strengthening relationships between U.S. forces and community leaders. Of note, using CERP for relationship-building is not a purpose mentioned in MAAWS.

4. **Limiting CERP's overall programmatic scope produces a more manageable program and better outcomes.**

Projects are more likely to be successful when: a) fewer projects are implemented, b) projects are smaller in scope, and c) the projects can be completed quickly. This is consistent with SIGIR's previous recommendations to match the size, scope, and number of projects to a unit's ability to provide adequate oversight.

5. **Involving national and local governments in project selection increases project success-rates.**

Iraqi governmental support for CERP projects helped ensure their success. GOI involvement was important not just to confirm that the Iraqis might find the project useful but also to ensure that the Iraqis would sustain it after it was built and transferred to their control. Of note, battalion commanders who reported involving local GOI officials in selecting projects also reported lower rates of fraud and corruption.

6. **Insufficient interagency integration in planning and execution limits CERP effectiveness.**

The lack of coordination among reconstruction agencies limited unity of effort and harmed the overall reconstruction plan. Although coordination between military and civilian agencies generally improved over time, survey respondents described persistent structural issues that impeded coordination and prevented effective communication among agencies. Military and civilian leaders often criticized their counterparts for insufficient oversight.

7. CERP projects should be executed in secure zones.

Poor security conditions limited oversight, management, and monitoring of projects. Although security was identified as a necessary prerequisite to the effective completion and continued monitoring of reconstruction efforts, projects were frequently implemented in areas that were not secure. This created needless strains on manpower and physical resources, limiting project success.

8. Fraud and corruption within CERP limits program effectiveness.

Fraud and corruption are endemic in Iraq. Some respondents viewed this reality as a cost of doing business, but others saw it as a fundamental impediment to accomplishing U.S. objectives. The descriptions of fraud and corruption encompassed a variety of different issues, ranging from government officials taking money to contractors colluding to inflate bids, and to the provision of grossly shoddy work. Although not seen as widespread, a few respondents did report knowledge of fraud on the part of Americans.

9. Capping the financial size of a CERP project increases the likelihood of its success and can reduce fraud.

Focusing efforts on projects that are smaller in size and scope can reduce levels of fraud and corruption.

10. Poorly monitored CERP projects can cause a loss of funds to insurgents.

Poorly managed reconstruction funding can result in funds ending up in the hands of insurgents.

Appendix A—Scope and Methodology

The analyses in this report are based on military and civilian officials' responses to a web-based survey designed to measure their perceptions and attitudes about the efficacy and impact of reconstruction and stabilization in Iraq.

Target Population

The target population for this survey was the civilian and military leaders who were responsible for allocating and/or expending reconstruction and stabilization funds. This survey was therefore administered to former Army and U.S Marine Corps battalion commanders, DoS PRT leaders, USAID representatives assigned to PRTs, and USACE resident, district, and area engineers. In order to be eligible to complete the survey, military and civilian personnel needed to be identified by their sponsoring organization as having served during at least one deployment in Iraq during OIF between March 2003 and September 2010, in a position where they were responsible for the planning, coordination, execution, and monitoring of stabilization funds, including, but not limited to, CERP.

Survey Administration

SIGIR contacted each military organization and civilian agency directly in order to identify a list of potential respondents and obtain their contact information (valid email addresses). The Army and Marine Corps provided email addresses of battalion commanders and engineers who had served in Iraq. USAID and DoS provided official email addresses currently on file for all PRT members and USAID personnel who served on PRTs during OIF. DoS provided contact information for some officials who did not meet all of the criteria listed above and therefore were not retained in the analytic sample.

SIGIR sent invitations to complete the survey by email using an account specifically set up for surveys. The link to the survey was embedded in the body of the email invitations. The invitation explained the purpose and origin of the survey and alerted respondents that responses were anonymous and participation was voluntary. The data collection period for each survey was approximately three weeks. SIGIR sent reminders to complete the survey two or three times during that period.

The survey was administered to Army battalion commanders beginning October 21, 2011. Data collection efforts concluded for all personnel on February 28, 2012. SIGIR sent out a total of 1,318 invitations to participate; 601 people (46%) logged into the survey, and of those, 390 completed surveys (30%) were submitted. Of the 414 Army and Marine Corps battalion commanders who logged in, 208 completed the survey. SIGIR also received responses from 182 civilian personnel and USACE engineers; however, of the 128 DoS personnel who completed the survey, only 28 identified themselves as being in positions of leadership and were therefore included in the analysis. In total, SIGIR received 290 valid responses from civilian and military leaders. Those 290 responses form the basis for the analysis in this report. Additional details are in Table 4.

Table 4—Survey Invitations, Responses, and Completions

Target Group	Invitations	Responses	Completions
Army battalion commanders	782	390	194
Marine battalion commanders	74	24	14
USACE	83	32	27
DoS	338	128	128
USAID	41	27	27
Total	1318	601	390

Former Army battalion commanders provided the majority of responses to the survey, which is in line with the number of units and Soldiers deployed during OIF. The comparatively low number of DoS and USAID responses may be explained by the fact that there were so few of them deployed to Iraq during OIF; PRTs were not established until 2006, and embedded PRTs (ePRT) were not established until 2007. To provide further context for the results presented in this report, Table 5 shows the distribution of former Army battalion commanders' responses by start and end dates of command.

Table 5—Distribution of Former Army Battalion Commanders' Responses by Start and End Dates of Command

	Pre-Surge 32%			Surge 30%		Post-Surge 28%		
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	No Response
2003	10%							
2004	0%	5%	0%					
2005		1%	15%	0%				
2006			1%	9%	2%			
2007					14%	4%		
2008					0%	14%		
2009						1%	12%	
2010							1%	
No Response								9%

Survey Design

The survey comprised primarily closed-ended questions regarding planning, implementation, and monitoring of reconstruction projects. These questions requested specific information about the timing and location of deployments, types and total costs of reconstruction projects for which they were responsible, and the most significant outcomes respondents were trying to achieve. Respondents were also asked to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of projects and interagency coordination efforts, and to evaluate the degree of severity of fraud and corruption that occurred. SIGIR also included several open-ended questions on the survey to understand how civilian and military leaders were measuring project impacts. Specifically, respondents were asked to describe the three most important metrics they used, and that were used by higher headquarters to measure project effectiveness. Respondents were also afforded the opportunity

at the end of the survey to provide additional comments on any issues they thought relevant. Knowing that many civilian and military personnel were likely to have served multiple deployments in Iraq, respondents were directed to consider experiences only from their most recent deployment in their responses.

SIGIR developed slightly different versions of the survey for each of the target groups. Surveys administered to Army and U.S. Marine Corps military personnel asked about Commander's Emergency Response Program funding specifically. Questions in the Department of State, USAID, and USACE surveys were broadly worded to include all reconstruction and stabilization funding. SIGIR also modified the wording of some questions in order to ensure that the leadership role of respondents could be appropriately identified and to ensure that questions about funding levels, interagency coordination, and the nesting of efforts within higher headquarters were appropriately worded. These modifications required a re-ordering of some questions in the civilian and military surveys in order to preserve flow, but the wording and response options were otherwise preserved across administrations to facilitate parallel analyses.

Limitations

SIGIR acknowledges several limitations of this survey:

- Survey respondents ended their deployments to Iraq as many as eight years ago. Military and civilian leaders may no longer be able to accurately or completely recall details from those deployments. Current attitudes and opinions may have been formulated based on experiences outside of Iraq or on more recent deployments.

- Survey responses were voluntary; SIGIR could not compel reconstruction leaders to complete the survey.

- In accordance with Department of Defense personnel policy, the Army, Marine Corps, and USACE are not permitted to provide contact information of private citizens. Only those who were still on active duty were therefore eligible to receive the survey. Among those who were deployed with USAID or DoS, only those whose official government email addresses were still active received the survey.

- Those currently deployed again or on leave were less likely than their counterparts to complete the survey due to limited account access or limited availability. Also, comments from those still on active duty may be different in non-random ways from those who have left military service, which may affect the range of opinions that were captured in the survey. Analyses based on self-reported data are best considered within the broader context of work completed by SIGIR and others documenting reconstruction efforts.

In order to ensure anonymity of survey respondents, no personally identifying information was collected. It is therefore possible that an original recipient of the survey forwarded the survey link to someone who was not in the original sample. However, SIGIR believes the likelihood of that happening was small. SIGIR did not find any anomalies in the responses that would suggest survey responses were provided by anyone who was not a former battalion commander, engineer, or civilian who served in OIF.

This report is not an audit product. Its methodology differs from the standards set for audit reports which use generally accepted government auditing norms issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

Appendix B—Acronyms

Acronym	Description
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program
DoD	Department of Defense
DoS	Department of State
ePRT	Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team
GOI	Government of Iraq
ICERP	Iraq Commander's Emergency Response Program
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SIGIR	Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USMC	U.S. Marine Corps

Appendix C—Report Team Members

This report was prepared under the direction of Craig Collier, Senior Advisor to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction.

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